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THE STRAIGHT SCOOP: Homophobia and Male Isolation Patterns

by Gerry Sutter

There was so much that surprised me when I began my Paris pilgrimage: the funny-looking crypts in the cemetery, the ornate old buildings. But I was struck most by the people. Closeness between adults was so foreign to me.

Lovers and mothers with children were not the only ones touching. People stood close to each other. An old man tapped an emphatic finger on the chest of one of his buddies. Two women strolled, holding hands in rapt conversation. A mother and her grown daughter strolled down the boulevard, smiling, saying nothing, arms hooked lightly on each other's waist.

When I saw the two old men standing so closely together, I felt like I'd walked into somebody's bedroom, and here it was a busy street. I didn't know the word, but I recognized my own homophobia.

WHY MALE ISOLATION?

I started to write about how a straight man suffers from homophobia: the irrational fear of gays and lesbians. But I ended up polarizing the world into the unequal halves that comprise "us straights" and "those other people." I created the isolation that I described. So, back to the drawing board. Before attempting to be spokesman for everyman, I first need to take soundings of my own issues around male isolation. Hence I return to my study, but with a refined viewpoint: as an outsider trying to find his own heart.

Male isolation has always fascinated me. There was always something "funny" about men. How is it that men could seem so odd? Or contrived? Or something. The something was different depending on the who. The similarity was distrust, fear, and a terror of being in a game where you don't

know the rules. Especially when men's stakes are life and death.

GERRY'S SONG

This is my song: fifteen years ago I actively distrusted men over thirty, and especially those with short hair and stout bellies. Now, of course, I qualify on all three accounts. My life is pretty complicated: a former wife and truly shared parenting, a four-year-old son full time, and a two-year-old son part time. Divorce proceedings. A relationship with a new wife and a daughter. Let's see, I teach Sunday school, and then there's the job, the job, same old thing, a lot of changes, fifty, sixty hours per week, and... Oh.

See friendship? Anywhere? It isn't on the list. I can say that my friends are important to me. They know that, and they respect what I'm doing. But they are not part of my survival. Some have lost patience. Friendship in this culture is scripted as secondary, rather a luxury, something to gaze at from afar, a jeweler's window in the mall at night. A good movie. Special times, to be conveniently and appropriately scheduled. Most of my friends do not hold their breath between conversations.

Two conclusions from Gerry's Song: First, male isolation patterns point away from themselves. None of the behavior patterns seem to harbor the negative values I find in racism, sexism, and adultism. I really believe that by sacrificing friendships I am merely attending to other areas of my life. Then I turn and watch other men.

I begin to see that society has imposed homophobia on all men, keeping us isolated from each other. If we have phony, distant relationships with other men, then we will never

figure out how much we hurt. Adult males generally do not develop true friendships until the tragedy of a divorce, breakdown, or some clinical disaster points out the imbalance of "manhood."

The second thing I learned was that my isolation from other men was not by conscious, intelligent choice. We learn to be professional, which means that we define our reasons for getting together. We join groups and associations and run whatever act we have together. Organizer, worker, net-worker, churchgoer. We are lulled into the belief that seeing someone once a month at a meeting is friendship.

We live in a society that thrives on male oppression. Most of our associations are either as focused as a sports team or as structured as a church service. Closeness between men, in and of itself, is not socially acceptable.

This is my starting point in charting my experience of homophobia. Sins of omission are like fallen leaves drifting in the autumn breeze, light brown and reverberating, the brown gold veins curling over each other, a crackle beneath a hiker's step. A lack of friends, like autumn leaves, is hardly noticed by the busy man.

THE LABEL FABLE

Before I can talk about being homophobic, I have a personally disquieting question: what is gay and what is straight? Let me sum up my difficulty with using labels to describe one's sexual orientation.

The first problem with labeling is all the assumptions that go along for the ride. Straights are perceived as the six M's: Monogamous, Married, Middle class, Moral Majority, and for men, Macho. Yet only a very small percentage of men fit all the M categories of straight. Our misperceptions of gays are even worse: effeminate, rich, affected, and promiscuous.

This is the stuff of snakes and snails and puppy-dog tails. The myth of masculinity is built on no more solid foundation than innuendo. Our perceptions appear so inflexible and rigid that I'm not sure that we can use terms like gay and straight without inducing distress.

Second, labels imply an either/or dichotomy: a person is either straight or gay. In fact, people's sexuality is not so simple. Most males experiment sexually with other males during childhood or adolescence. This does not mean that most men are gay.

Third, once we're labeled, we monkey with our behavior to conform to our social perceptions. What a crime not to nurture my sons because it seems unmasculine! Snuggling with my four-year-old son is a sensuous pleasure: the warm human stuff that humanity is built upon. I truly don't know where sensuousness becomes eroticism. But when my son and I snuggle, it is a very different thing than when my mate and I share foreplay.

Fourth, labeling imposes a finality upon one's sexual orientation, implying a static reality like being blonde or six

feet tall. Sex happens between individuals, and should. It seems illogical for anyone to write off fifty per cent of humanity from intimate, even sexual relationships.

SEXISM AND PATRIARCHY

I used to think that my attitude toward men that "you just can't trust nobody" and my "women are only dumb broads" attitude were two different issues. I avoided women out of timidity and evaded men out of fear. Then I saw they were the same phenomenon: the two faces of Janus, the guardian god of hell.

The logic of sexism starts with patriarchy, which portrays men as the gender with power and control. This is the mindset that condones stereotyped thinking and allows us to treat classes of people differently.

The main goal of patriarchy is isolation. The key elements are domination and control. The triangle where one man at the top rules those below enlists all to support the system because they get to mistreat others below them. We are left with very narrow, limited, and pretense-laden relationships with each other. You know it's safe to talk about football or the weather, or tell jokes, or tell business stories. That's the limit.

Sexism, the belief that women are somehow subservient to males, is the mirror image of patriarchy. With sexism the plot thickens into misogyny: the hatred we have for women for being dismissed by men as second-class human beings.

I never hated women, just everything female. When I was young, everything female was "yuck!" And everything romantic was "corn!" We are told, "Ya gotta be a man, gotta be a man, a real man."

And most of us have spent a lot of energy proving that this is so. Our belief system is maintained by a set of sanctions which are the rigid stuff of oppression. We are bombarded with the mystique of masculinity: "Do your own thing and don't let anything or anyone get in your way."

Remember how every story has a complication? Well, here it is. Compel a boy to live up to an impossible masculine ideal, then take away the role model. What is his behavior likely to be? Nothing's left except fantasy. Becoming a man is becoming someone who is not there.

Let us now stir into the plot a real antagonist, women. Scorning nearly everything feminine, boys are dumped on mothers and teachers. This is truly a no-win situation for both. We have the greatest scorn for males who exhibit "female" behavior. Here is the key to understanding our homophobia. What we probably hate most about gays is that they have not joined the club of male superiority.

MELTING THE ICEBERG?

But the homophobia we project onto gay men is only the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface we harbor a compulsive, irrational fear of other men, period.

How many of us really knew our fathers? I do now, but then—well, we sort of weren't in the same script, is how it felt to me. Many of us have suffered from failed and distant relationships with our fathers. When, in our youth, we responded inappropriately, we were in danger of being beaten. Or ignored. We redirected this pattern at each other. We were taught to mistreat women by other boys and men who physically and emotionally mistreated us. We have found ourselves on the losing end with men. Victims. This has led to the general reserve, bordering on paranoia, that men feel toward each other.

HOMOPHOBIA OPPRESSES EVERYONE

Who can tell the dancer from the dance? Male isolation and gay oppression spin and twirl as the same reality. Society values "being a real man" and believes that any variation from the norm is a reflection on male virility.

Homophobia is usually defined as the irrational fear of gay men and lesbians. By simply focusing on how homophobia oppresses gays, however, we lose sight of how straights are victimized by homophobia. Like any form of oppression, homophobia has cruel repercussions for all human beings.

Homophobia completely undermines the natural ability of men to love other men deeply. Thus homophobia dehumanizes not only gays, the obvious targets of oppression, but any man who is isolated from others. Homophobia perpetuates and sanctions our isolation. We experience rigid, critical, competitive, and fearful relationships with others. We fear and systematically mistreat those who are not of our gender, age, class, race, or religion. Thus our shallow, arms-length, distrustful, and antagonistic relationships with other men validate every irrational and rigid behavior pattern that we have with women and children as well.

Society encourages intimacy only in our monogamous heterosexual relationships. Our fear of getting close to anyone else in our lives sanctions our isolation. Homophobia points to neither personality characteristics nor inherent flaws, but mere bad habits that allow us to mistreat others and ourselves or let others be mistreated.

Why do so many of us feel fumble-footed in our efforts to relate to each other? Why aren't men vulnerable with other men? Why do we put up with dirty jokes, vacation stories, and football? Why does our hard work seem disingenuous? Competitive? Why is it that we need to come out on top? Why is failing to follow the Code of Masculinity so threatening to so many men? All of these issues are tied up in this tiny package of "being a real man." This is homophobia at its core.

So, dear reader, let us crack the door ajar, just inches, and peek at how much of this madness of manhood is hung in the closet of homophobia.

MEN AND FRIENDSHIPS

My friend Jay just wrote me. He was worried about

losing touch with his Virginia buddies. Half his letter chronicled how his wife demanded he give up the mystical relationship with his lover/former girlfriend. I am honored, of course, that he reached out to me. For ten years Jay and I were best friends until he moved across the country. We made a point to get together. We shared our deepest, silliest thoughts, played frisbee, and read "heavy literature." Both our wives were jealous for years until finally, the issue of who was whose friend became blurry.

For those of us in middle age who are married, what happens? When we are asked who our best friends are, the answer is often as above: a school buddy who lives halfway across the world and whom we talk to on the phone twice a year.

At least part of the reason is that a real friendship requires vulnerability as well as boldness. The norm for adult men in this society is the "team player." The team player is competitive, goal oriented, and co-manipulative. There is no room on the team for intimacy and/or bonding. Why is this? My first thought is: homophobia.

MEN AND TOUCH

I once got up my gumption and asked my older brother why he wasn't more nurturing with his young children. His boys came to me like iron filings to a magnet when I lived with them for a short while. He answered that he felt that since our dad was in the war during his toddler years, he just didn't know what to do with young boys.

What my brother didn't mention was the time around puberty that our grandmother called us both queers because he was tickling me. We called the game "iron finger." Being weak with giddiness, I remember laughing with abandon. Later, as we were riding in the car, I was criticized for using the term queer (to mean odd), and my father gave my brother and me our first moral lecture on the sexual unnaturalness of men being attracted to each other.

Of course I don't know, and it is not even my job to wonder. However, if you asked me now why my brother didn't snuggle more with his two boys and why he didn't see it as his job to be physically close and nurturing to his boys, I would ask, "Wasn't he trained (if only by example) to think that contact between men (outside sports) is unmanly?" Plain and simple. Homophobia.

MEN AND FEELINGS

My first job out of college, I became the friend of Nick, who I still suspect should be the Monet of the twentieth century. His visions are a treasure to me. One day I shared how much I liked him. He answered, "Why do you have to say that? Why not just let the friendship be?" I felt rejected, like I'd done something wrong, stepped over some boundary that I hadn't known was there. Wrong in a way that marijuana and liquor were not.

Many women are frustrated with men's apparent emo-

tional numbness. Men seem emotionally stupid, if not careless and irresponsible. Emotional repression is a double edged sword. The first swipe cuts us by bottling up our very natural feelings, which in some leads to less than rational venting of that very male characteristic, rage. Male conditioning is a veneer over our personalities that keeps us from attending to the present. Instead we tend the steaming cauldron of our unexpressed hurt. Our repressed emotions cripple our immune systems and contribute to the stress-related diseases to which men seem predisposed.

The second swipe of the sword lands on those around us: other men, women, and children. By repressing feelings, we force our mates to bear the brunt of our isolation. The only place that we have particular permission to share our emotions is in our intimate partnered relationships. Women assert that this is one of the key ways that they are oppressed by men. It is unrealistic for a lover to be the sole target for all of another's disappointment, fear, and hurt. This is especially true when the hurt is distilled though male conditioning and comes out as arrogance, depression, rage, and violence. Men need to take responsibility for their own emotional well-being.

The McGill Report on Male Intimacy found, after interviewing hundreds of men, that only one man in ten had a friend with whom he felt safe enough to talk about his marriage or problems at work. A whopping one in twenty had a relationship with another man that was safe enough for him to talk about his real feelings or sexual life. What happens to us that keeps us from being safe enough to get close to each other? Are you beginning to see a pattern? Homophobia.

MEN AND ACHIEVEMENT

I went into work at ten o'clock last Thursday night and found Xavier cleaning up our office. We talked for an hour and a half. Xavier is a full time plus Project Manager whose excellence qualifies him for lots of overtime projects. He is a committed father of four children and is president of his school's PTA. He also had a heart attack three months ago.

After his hospitalization, I made it a point to find out how he really has been doing. He is relentless, determined, and never asks for help. He works three jobs so his wife can go to school. Why does he push so hard?

Men are raised in this society to see ourselves as expendable. We drive ourselves like crazy to meet rigid external objectives. If we flag and fall, we expect to be rolled out of the way and replaced by a fresh body.

It would be inaccurate to say that homophobia causes over-responsibility patterns. Both overdoing and isolation patterns hook each other, however. Men run away from intimate relationships by working hard. We bury our psyches in external focus. Prepared to die young. Worshipping occupation.

Burn-out and workaholism are fairly new maladies in popular consciousness. When we look at what allows people

to crack, what spurs on depression, it is often noted that isolation and lack of support are bigger factors than the quantity of work. Validation and support appear to be two powerful contradictions to burn-out. What keeps us from asking for lots of support and validation for our efforts? What keeps us from having just dozens and dozens of supporters who expect the best of us? There I go again: homophobia.

MEN AND SEX

Our obsession with sex is directly tied to our fear of sex. This is the paradox of homophobia. Sex and our fear of it involves much more than fornication: vulnerability, emotions, intimacy. Men think we are good at sex, we're proud of our sex drive, we're even arrogant about our need for sex and our supposed prowess as lovers ("Honey, did you come?"). But we can't face the reality that our real fear is not sex but vulnerability.

That we project women into the vulnerable role is the disquieting realization that men need to confront. That we refuse to be vulnerable with other men shows not power but a disdain of intimacy. What could be more unmanly than betraying your manliness by being womanly in sex?

The assumption that closeness and sex are connected expresses a dread of closeness and a wariness of sex. People link having sex with getting close and can't imagine intimate, candid closeness without it being sexual in nature. This makes men paranoid of each other, back-stepping whenever the excitement of disclosure opens into excitement, because we distrust closeness, fearing the repercussions of sex.

Why is it that we accept this view of the world of "all or nothing"? It doesn't make sense except from a very afraid point of view. Why do we tolerate being tied down by paranoia, either ours or our mate's? And again: homophobia.

MEN AND VIOLENCE

Men have had truth pounded into them. Violence is considered almost a secondary male sexual characteristic, along with the hair on the chest. You know, men have deep voices and fight in wars. It is part of a man's job description to be able to kill another human being and expect to be killed in return.

Is it any wonder that we are a mite distrustful of each other? As the heavy hand of the father falls, the pattern continues. I learned that either I beat up Bill or he'll beat up on me. And the phrase matured into "Kill or be killed."

We are given so little validation for being good friends, for being nurturing, and in many circles, for being intelligent. Is it any surprise that many men find that their only special domain is violence?

But before we can be competent at dutifully blowing each other's brains out, we need to dehumanize our opponents. So we learn to demean, to deprecate, to call each other names. It seems like a part of "strutting our stuff." It can be

a catching habit, particularly with women. And then children. And so the violence shows up—in domestic situations. Or behind the wheel. Or in bars. Or in prisons. Why is it that we carry around a standard of behavior that puts some of us above others? Why do we maintain the mantle of distrust so often when getting to know another man? Again, here we go: homophobia.

MEN AND GAY OPPRESSION

Homophobia is rooted in the horrified perception that a man who has a sexual relationship with another man has deeply violated his own integrity by fundamentally and irrevocably dishonoring his own being as a man. A profound grasp of maleness has been abused, and in that relationship with one's own sexual givenness all men feel threatened.

OK. Let's ignore the fact that we live in an oppressive society where people get fired from jobs, excommunicated from churches, harassed and assaulted when their views don't conform to commonly accepted prejudices. Let's overlook the reality of media-induced hysteria that sees the AIDS epidemic as divine judgement. Let's forget for a while that there are a lot of men who are gay. Let's put aside how deeply these men are hurt by the prejudice of homophobic society, such as the message that they have to be cured. Have you tried healing your father of his heterosexuality lately? And what messages would society need to lay on you that would make such behavior anything less than preposterous? That's homophobia. And such as name calling: Sissy, Faggot, and Queer. Forget all this, because this is an article for straight men.

So let's start with how a person is hurt by being an abuser. First, people don't hurt others unless they have been cruelly hurt or bear hurt's witness. There seems to be something like contagion at work. The way abusiveness is modeled to young children puts a yoke of fear around their necks. We tend to reenact our mistreatment in later life, with the former victim playing abuser.

Mistreatment parades as power. It is not power because it is enacted in ignorance and rigidity, motivated by fear, and as thoughtless as littering. Straights tend to be very insensitive. We snicker at the gay joke, let the name-calling slide, ignore the battering. In short, give up thinking. We don't even want to think about homosexuality.

Calling each other sissies and fags, kids learn the power of gay oppression years before they know what sex is about, not to mention homosexuality or which people are gay. When I was a child, faggot was just a bad, yuckie, female-ish sort of word. So we played this game called "how not to be a sissy." And we stuck manhood, courage, bravery, and some of the really good stuff in the game. We believed it all.

Then we get to go out and prove it. We had to be real men. We had to worry about not being half as manly as others were. This proving is very hard work, because we are measuring ourselves against rigid expectations of manhood.

When closeness is tantamount to unmanliness, nurturing is pigeon-holed by isolation, and candor is cloaked in cynicism, we have lost a very special part of ourselves. This is the real cost of being an abuser. We lock ourselves in rigidity and insecurity. When we stop oppressing others, we figure out that there is greater richness for us by channelling empowerment and support, rather than just sticking old scripts in the player.

How is it that we have a hurt we can't even be allowed to feel, much less overcome? We project our own fear and insecurity onto others, shouting, "Get away, get away! AIDS!" It is this mantle of insecurity that will be lifted when we move against gay oppression.

So why are we so down on gays? It has nothing to say about being gay. It's merely—what's that word on the tip of my tongue?—ah, yes, homophobia.

MEN AND LIBERATION

Our task is to confront gay oppression in the world and overcome it within ourselves. This is no slight accomplishment. I have a four point program for confronting homophobia and contradicting male isolation.

Point 1: Become aware of the subtle, pervasive, and systemic dimensions of homophobia.

I have been working to understand the scope of homophobia in society. I am like the fish that can't grasp what water is because he can't separate himself from it. But unlike the fish that can't live without water, I could live quite happily without homophobia. My pattern of distrusting others, of remaining isolated, alone, busy, and distracted is not inherently part of my life. It is the result of rigid, although often ambiguous and subtle conditioning. It can be very helpful to remember that certain behavior is indeed habituated, such as everything about homophobia.

Point 2: Become aware of homophobia as your personal issue.

It is one thing to admit, "Yeah, men act pretty weird with each other." Take the next step and recognize, "Yeah, I act pretty weird with men." The play of homophobia is in every part of your life. It is acted out at bus stops and metros, fast foods and parking lots, offices and elevators. And with wives and best friends. How you are with men will be your job to straighten out. This is what I mean by making homophobia your personal issue. First, notice how you are with men. With older men. With boys. With men of a different race. And class. Do you see a pattern of paranoia? Does that seem human? Can I interest you in changing?

Point 3: Become committed to healing ourselves as men.

There is a curious pattern in our gender role conditioning. Sexism creates interlocking, co-dependent relation-

ships. Women are nurturing; men are controlled and stony. Each becomes dependent on the other to compensate for our learned inadequacies. We are not complete human beings as long as our lives are made barren by our isolation patterns. This is the real reason why we take responsibility for healing ourselves, to understand and then contradict homophobia in our lives.

Awareness is something, but it's not healing. You can't begin to feel less isolated or become less hesitant to make friends without confronting the way you distrust men. And it is tricky because a lot of our issues about men are internalized, subconscious, or otherwise looking like something else.

For some the healing process may require counseling, because our fantasy images of sex and masculinity, while inappropriate, are deeply ingrained and habituated.

Point 4: Become an activist: make a commitment that your entire life will be a contradiction to gay oppression and male isolation.

If you have no gay friends, you either have very superficial relationships or have managed to isolate yourself from homosexuality. Perhaps both. Your life will be richer if you confront people, all kinds of people, and deal with the fear as it comes up.

I want to share some guidelines that I use in confronting gay oppression and my own internalized homophobia:

1. *Listen first.* If you want someone to be attracted to you, help him understand himself. Instead of settling for superficiality, ask juicy questions, such as "What is most difficult for you to give?" or "What is your biggest dream?" Encourage and don't interrupt. Be non-judgemental.

2. When it is your turn to speak, *be as candid as possible.* This often involves making a compact not to misuse personal information that you share. This is a consensual first step in developing a friendship.

3. *Don't trap a friendship in your brain.* We are all conditioned to deal from our intellect. There are, of course, professional standards of behavior. Just don't limit your friendships by these artificial conventions.

4. *There is no reason why men shouldn't hug each other.* But don't take touching for granted. Ask for a hug and be willing to talk about what it means and doesn't mean. If you want to invite a man to share candidly, sit near him. If your friend is on the verge of tears, why not put a hand on his shoulder or take his hand? This may open up real emotional communication, rather than mere talk.

5. *Work on your sexual feelings,* and lack thereof, regarding women and men. Because women may trigger our male conditioning, you may be more comfortable and less confused in talking with another man.

6. *Don't mix up sex with intimacy.* You can give massages, be playful, candid, loving, nurturing. Be.

7. *Share your fears* of your friend with your friend. But

know that your fear is your problem and not your friend's. Don't pull away because you are afraid to confront him, are confused, or whatever.

8. *Validate your friend's sexual orientation,* whether it agrees with yours or not, even when you find it threatening. If you can genuinely love another man and offer him your heart, you will have no fear of unwanted sexual advances.

9. *"You can ask anything of me as long as I can say no,"* is a good agreement to have with friends (and lovers, as well, I find). This way there are no artificial assumptions about limits. One is encouraged to be free to ask and choose as well.

10. *Know that others genuinely like you* regardless of how they respond. We don't know how to interpret others' expressions because most of us wear so much internalized distress on our faces. We are so hesitant that our own initial response is just about as suspect. What makes sense is to rely on what is true: that we are good people, very desirable, and worth knowing. Then learn to behave this way with everyone.

11. *Get a friend.* Be bold and let him know that you are drawn to him. Deal with sexuality up front. Take the time to get together regularly. You will probably find that you will need to make it a priority. Enjoy, relearn how to play, exercise, be physical, all the stuff that was natural when you were ten years old. Then make another friend.

12. *To heal:* Attend NOCM-DC's monthly meetings and special events which support "changing men" in contradicting homophobia. Join a support group.

13. *Join Co-counseling.* The program is singularly effective at contradicting people's isolation patterns. Get other one-way counseling.

14. Make *having close relationships* a goal in your life. Find those who will support you as you figure out what you need to know (sometimes the hard way).

15. *Move against gay oppression* wherever you encounter it. Don't laugh at the joke. Don't reason with derision, just interrupt it: "That's wrong. Stop it." As a straight man, I am able to intervene more objectively than a gay person. I do because it is my relationship with the thoughtless abuser that is being limited by his or her narrowness and idiocy.

16. *A sense of humor* is always a good tool to use in confronting prejudice. "My, what an enlightened comment! Did someone run over your wife this morning?" "Are you jealous or what?"

17. Be outspoken as *an ally of gay persons.* Invite compassion into your life. This means becoming sensitive to the profound, hidden, and sometimes unconscious suffering that is the stuff of daily life for every lesbian and gay man. Risk developing an honest, loving relationship with at least one person who has this experience.

Perhaps "straights" can never know 95 per cent of what this is like, but we can care enough to taste just a little bit. And it is this little bit that is crucial in keeping all of us connected as human beings, without which homophobia dehumanizes us all. □

ANDROIDS VS. SUPERDICKS

in the evolution of human consciousness

by Marshall Jones

DISCOVERING OUR HOMOPHOBIA

The National Organization for Changing Men will sponsor a national conference on homophobia in 1988. This event may help to increase our awareness of the pervasive ways in which homophobia oppresses all people in our culture.

The key to significant consciousness-raising may be in perceiving that homophobia is a central element in our socialization and thus in the structure of our collective unconscious in Western culture, rather than being simply another "other people's problem." Our homophobic programming stems from the compulsory heterosexism of our patriarchal culture. As a result we've all been deeply wounded by internalized "homoerotophobia," for our fear has undermined our deepest ability to love—especially ourselves.

DEPROGRAMMING OUR HOMOPHOBIA

I am personally involved in creating experiential small group opportunities to confront our homophobic cultural programming and to share our deepest fears of the erotic dimension of life and our longing for reunion with alienated elements of ourselves and others.

We need to design more experiential approaches that reveal/decode/deprogram/exorcise that tight little knot of fear that makes us shrink not so much from touching each other physically as from touching one another emotionally in self-disclosing ways that build real intimacy with our brothers.

These experiences can be an introduction to the task of "self-deprogramming" if we can develop enough trust and honesty with one another to name and embrace our deepest fears as parts of our innermost being rather than externalities or behaviors we would like to avoid, deny, or ignore. When we dare to "own" our fears, we may have the power to laugh with the cosmic laughter,

to embrace one another, and to begin the healing process of loving exactly the uniquely special screwed-upness that we each showed up with.

DECODING OUR SUPERDICK FANTASIES

Item: the author of the screenplay for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* has revealed that he wrote a *love story* because there wasn't anything else to hang the movie on. And no, he wasn't talking about Kathrine Ross. What he *was* talking about was falling in love with *cowboy/bandit movie masculinity*, ala Robert Redford/Paul Newman.

Item: ten out of ten American men, when exposed to X-rated hardcore movies of every variety, secretly and vicariously identify with a single character stereotype we shall call *Superdick*. Get the picture?

OK, guys, here's another movie. Harrison Ford, working undercover for the *Post*, investigates some weird psychic phenomena at St. Elizabeth's that lead him, alone against the universe, to this unbelievable discovery: at the top of the Washington Monument (Superdick again) is an ultrasecret Psychic Control Center that is beaming patriarchal-sexist thought control signals that unconsciously influence every human being within a thousand mile radius. But the NSA's new Supermind computer detects that Harrison has failed to perform his assigned program and in fact may be an enemy agent, an undetectably Android form of Higher Consciousness! You decide whether Harrison gets to repel up the GWM (*no, this is not the Personals section*) or whether he must run up the stairs while the CIA guys get stuck in the elevator.

OUR FEAR AND FASCINATION WITH EROS

Gentle Reader, let me tell you another tale, sort of. We may perceive that most men want to be deeply connected with the source of male erotic energy in the

universe. What is this essential maleness, this *Yang* energy source? How do we discover it in ourselves? Sometimes it appears as cosmic erotic ecstasy, and we want to laugh and play with the entire universe. It's awe and wonder and passion and delight. And it's a doorway to the transpersonal Self: the inner healer who is compassionate, loving, intuitive, spontaneous, creative, open, connected, and peaceful.

But we also experience being unplugged, or unfulfilled in our yearning to be more at one with this inner core of ourselves, with our capacity for self-actualizing peak experiences. So, allowing for his sexist persona, we may sit back and let Harrison Ford, the cosmic Superdick hero, Do It For Us, while we drink in his wonderful Stuff. *Do we really do that at the movies? Come on, ya gotta be kiddin'!* We get a vicarious kick out of these fantasy images of male erotic energy. It's really safe to lose ourselves in being a celluloid hero for awhile. But the popcorn aroma fades in the cold winter light of the real world. For some reason we can do things alone in the dark that we don't do in real relationships. We commune with our fantasy images, yet we're scared to let somebody real crack our shell. *Isolated, impregnable, unfertilized ova wait forever for a terrible swift thrust of the magic swordcock of the universe.*

BEAM ME UP, SUPERDICK!

Now listen up, guys. Behind our distressed male sexual fantasy life—however projected onto suitable targets of the preferred gender and the desirable range of age, height, weight, physical endowment, complexion, and interests (*no, this is not the Personals section*)—is simply our perceived need to embody or possess male erotic energy, and to encounter or receive female *Yin* erotic energy. We may yearn for the Yin, but we hang on the Yang in the Wang. And thereby hangs another tale.

But since we have the choice of hanging together or hanging separately (Ben Franklin), what keeps us from hanging together? What keeps us from sharing our wonderful Yang/Wang energy together? It's simply that Superdick consciousness is homophobic. Isolated, impregnable, unfertilized, and vulnerably invulnerable. And because we're fascinated and terrified by Superdick, an impossible standard that threatens *our* personal masculinity, we may feel highly ambivalent about our perceived need to embody or possess a more generous

measure (*Jeez, we're measuring again!*) of Yang/Wang energy. *Ergo* we're *all* internally homophobic in relation to our universal homoerotic energy needs. *Ergo* we *all* experience *homoerotophobic* programming by our Psychic Control Centers. Our cosmic *HERO* is *HomoEROtophobic*. And that, Gentle Reader, is why we're scared to hang together.

WE YEARN FOR THE YIN

In the immortal words of the guys in *South Pacific*, "What don't we get? You know damn well!" We may know damn well when we're not "getting it," but as long as we're pussy-fixated, we're unaware that *our* Yin (female) energy is really the profound energy of the Heart, even as our Yang is in the Wang. How do we men get in touch with the Yin energy already present in us? What are our denial patterns that block our awareness of Yin energy in ourselves? How do we receive or block the Yin energy flow from women and other men? Because we usually yearn for the Yin in the opposite sex, we may miss out on the deep, magickal connectedness of heart energy that bonds together members of the same sex.

DEPRIVATION, INHIBITION, AND OUR FEAR OF LOVING

Because we are *all* erotophobic (sexually screwed-up) in uniquely special ways, gay/straight is for me a very superficial distinction, in light of the fact that in this culture we are *all* unconsciously in a seriously deprived and inhibited condition.

As adults we are culturally deprived of many opportunities for intimate sensory/loving stimuli: being touched lovingly and learning to touch others lovingly—both of which are deeply healing experiences. And yet our culture teaches us that this severe deprivation is "normal" development.

Consequently, we expect to fulfill our sensory development needs as adults exclusively within our narrowly defined sexual experience. Our culture defines "sex" as *performance*, or *achievement* of one or more genital orgasms, usually isolated from total-body orgasmic awareness.

So much for deprived. Now let's talk inhibited. In the line from "Officer Krupke," "We're depraved on accounta we're deprived!" (But guys, we're *all* de-

praved, not just those "sex perverts.") Depraved, in other words, 'cause we're all inhibited in trying to be loving human beings in an anti-erotic cultural environment. And this means we are *all* inhibited in deeply loving members of our own sex, not to mention members of the opposite sex, whether or not either of the above are our sexual partners. *Yes, we may screw 'em, but we're scared to love 'em.* Now *that's* talking depraved.

HEALING OUR EROTIC DISABILITY

Now let's talk disabled. How do we begin to heal our erotic disability? Perhaps the first step is in becoming aware of our deep personal woundedness that persists as a "core memory" long after we have forgotten the experiences that triggered it. Every human being has an experiential arena of high sensitivity/vulnerability/fear that persists as an issue in selfhood or self-understanding. Our collective and individual unconscious is the cemetery where we try to bury those unpleasant, unresolved developmental issues that come back to haunt our present quest for personal fulfillment. *But bringing up old wounds in my psyche only raises my anxiety level!*

The issue of sexual preference masks our erotic disability. Those of us who are lesbian- or gay-identified may erect walls that insulate us from being attracted by, and sometimes attractive to, the opposite sex. Those of us who are straight-identified usually can't deal with being attractive to or attracted by members of the same sex, whether or not that attraction ever becomes specifically "sexual." Our internalized homoerotophobia is a wounding disability that isolates us all, gay and straight, from the nourishment that deep friendship can bring to our lives. Likewise, we are all disabled by our internalized heteroerotophobia, or fear of erotic attraction to members of the opposite sex. While it is not difficult to identify this fear in lesbian or gay persons, we may not realize that straight men and women are often inhibited from forming deep friendships with members of the opposite sex because they consciously or unconsciously fear the possibility of having an erotic experience that may seem threatening to their existing pair-bond commitments.

We are *all* isolated from opportunities for deeply loving other human beings by the cultural myth that our genitally exclusive pair-bond relationships can fully satisfy our needs and capacities for profoundly intimate

loving communication, both verbal and nonverbal.

While we can't express in words the emotions we are afraid of having, the central fear behind our emotional isolation is *the touch taboo*: touching or being touched by another is a very "touchy" matter because we have such immense conflicts over our *need* for and *resistance* to giving and receiving through the physical and emotional connectedness of healing touch. Because our culture identifies our need for touching so completely with genital sexual experience, we may "freeze" when we most need to experience human warmth and affection. The old, unconscious scars of our personal insecurities may continue to haunt us, blocking our capacities to become more sensitive, loving human beings, isolating us from our profound connectedness to those others who are most deeply a part of ourselves.

OVERCOMING OUR FEAR OF LOVING

We can feel good about getting close to other men as long as we don't have to deal with our homoerotophobia. But getting close always eventually brings this up! It is in our bloodstream as preconscious programming, and gets triggered as fear when we experience profound intimacy with another member of the same sex. Then we have to deal with our distress.

In NOCM-DC the compulsory heterosexism of our culture is masked by the mutual acceptance of gay and straight members of our group, and by our group's gay-affirmative stance. Yet we have not eliminated or acknowledged the pervasive heterosexism that shows up in our group as "straight" insensitivity toward or unawareness of the conscious and unconscious suffering borne by all members of the oppressed "AIDS victim" group. So we have superficial gay/straight togetherness, masking our deep unconscious attitudinal perspectives.

But the good news is that we are an openminded, sensitive group that is building a powerful sense of connectedness and bonding around our common male experience. We need to confront together our common homoerotophobia and the pervasive structural and conceptual universe of patriarchal heterosexism. If we can begin to love and trust one another more deeply, we can move together toward a compassionate level of transpersonal intimacy. Healing ourselves with erotic energy may begin to contradict our profound experience of deprivation/distress which forces the women in our lives to assume an exclusive nurturing/mothering role.

THE SEXUAL HEALING PROCESS

Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalysis as a way to "decode" the unconscious erotic distress leading to "abnormal" behavior. He described female hysteria as disease or disorder, not fully understanding the sexist cultural values underlying the individual pathology he sought to treat. We need to revise Freud's perspective, moving beyond the disease model of mental/emotional or psychic distress in order to heal ourselves and society at a deeper level.

We may feel distress in our longing for union with what seems to be missing in our living/loving. We have been culturally programmed to mistrust our own deepest erotic feelings and to condemn ourselves for having them. We feel uncomfortably vulnerable when we try to share these with anyone else, even those whom we wish to trust completely. And we deeply believe that we are emotionally inadequate: feeling incapable of loving and giving enough to meet another's needs, we may shrink from every opportunity for an intimate encounter which could be a healing experience.

We're so sexually distressed in this culture that it's hard to imagine a condition of non-distressed sexuality. But let's try. Imagine what it would be like to experience sexual healing or wholeness.

Imagine men really being able to love and delight in women rather than experiencing suspicion, anxiety, lust, anger, or resentment. Imagine us sharing with women in deep, transpersonal intimacy without fear or sexual exploitation. Imagine us listening to and appreciating women as human beings richly endowed in the spirit dimension of life, without hiding our real feelings or trying to get them into bed.

Imagine men really being able to love and delight in each other rather than experiencing suspicion, anxiety, greed, anger, or competitiveness. Imagine us sharing with each other in deep, transpersonal intimacy without fear or sexual exploitation. Imagine us listening to and appreciating other men as human beings richly endowed in the spirit dimension of life, without hiding our real feelings or trying to get them into bed.

Healing is experienced as transformative, personal empowerment in radical love for a particular "Thou," in and through whom the Lover totally embraces both all Creation and his own personal history and destiny. We

are healed as we become deeply whole persons. Yet our personal scars are not simply erased from our memory, as it were. In the experience of healing our deepest woundedness is transformed from a source of uncontrollable fear and resentment to the means of intuitive, compassionate sharing of others' suffering and the promise that they too may be healed.

SEXUAL HEALING AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE: ENDING MALE SELF-OPPRESSION

The healing process happens in transcending the barriers between consciousness and the collective unconscious. As we begin to get in touch with the deep sources of personal conflict, our internalized relationships with significant persons in our lives are transformed in the discovery that sexual healing is not some cosmic goal, solution, or answer, but rather the consciousness journey itself.

From the perspective of evolved consciousness we now see all of our "normal" male sexual performance patterns as unconscious distress patterns. If we can transcend our cultural programming, detaching ourselves from our distress, we may become cosmic Androids: "Body the same as before, . . . yet unaccountably new." (D.H. Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth")

We can repent of our self-oppression by making the revolutionary commitment to transform the fundamental social reality of patriarchy—male economic, political, cultural, and psychological dominance—starting with ourselves and our assumption of male privilege. Only then may we "cross into another world" (DHL) of holistic, nonlinear/nonstraight, androgynous consciousness. Our gay brothers, born for this moment in human evolution, will lead the way.

"The commitment of a *gay man* to ending male dominance *within himself* is a great and magickal Nightjourney of shamanistic trial and transmutation, a complete and thorough self-alteration, a great and living Round in growing, glowing consciousness, a double-helixed, evolutionary Self dancing." (Mitch Walker)

Ah no, I cannot tell you what it is, the new world.

I cannot tell you the mad, astounded rapture of its discovery.

I shall be mad with delight before I have done, and whosoever comes after will find me in the new world a madman in rapture. (D.H. Lawrence)